

Creating a disruption (Mark 10:46-52)

There is a tearing at the social fabric when Bartimaeus cries to Jesus.

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As a former military brat, I shudder a bit whenever I encounter Bartimaeus's total defiance of the rules and expectations of his world. He could get in trouble, I immediately think. I grew up in a household with many rules and expectations, all with the intended purpose of creating predictability and order—at least the appearance of it. And so, when Bartimaeus disrupts the rules and expectations around the behavior of beggars—not once but twice—I am both amazed and worried for him.

I imagine the crowd also hears this tearing at the social fabric when Bartimaeus cries to Jesus. They immediately try to shush him. Perhaps they, too, feel the chaos encroaching in this blind beggar's shouts?

But when Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him, he does not reprimand him or remind him of his place. He does nothing to quiet Bartimaeus or restore order. And he certainly doesn't put the onlookers back at ease.

Instead, he asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus makes no presumptions. He doesn't give Bartimaeus money or food. He doesn't offer him sight. He invites Bartimaeus to tell him, in his own words, what mercy he is shouting

out for, in defiance of all social expectations that he just sit quietly by the road.

Bartimaeus tells Jesus that he wants to be healed of his blindness. And so Jesus heeds this call and gives him the sight he so desires. This is not just one more healing story in Mark's Gospel; it's one in which the person healed has a name. He has the audacity to cry out for mercy—and then shout it even louder when everyone around him is telling him to keep his mouth shut.

Is it a coincidence that Jesus is traveling from Jericho—that famed city that came crumbling down thanks to shouting—when he encounters Bartimaeus?

What happens after the miracle is unconventional, too. Bartimaeus, who has cast off his cloak along with social expectations to come face to face with Jesus, moves from the side of the road—out of the margins—and right onto it. In the very same sentence in which he is healed, he joins Jesus: “Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.”

My relationship with order and predictability is complicated. I prefer events to be scheduled and get anxious when my plans and expectations are disrupted. But this story always thrills me. It's not chaos that Jesus ushers in with his very miracles; it's a whole new order. It makes me wonder what might happen if I could set aside, even momentarily, all my concern with politeness and propriety. Would I be shouted down, told to be quiet? Would Jesus stop in his tracks and call to me, “Come here. What do you want me to do for you?”

What would I ask for? And healed, restored, given all that I need, what would I do next?